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## **The Memory of the National and the National as Memory.**

“...la verdad de la memoria no radica tanto en la exactitud de los hechos (*res factae*) como en el relato y en la interpretación de ellos (*res fictae*).”<sup>1</sup>

(Lechner and Güell 1999: 186)

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**Abstract:** My essay seeks to illuminate a different, more encompassing kind of transition than that from dictatorship to post-dictatorship (and its attendant forms of memory of military brutal force and human rights abuses) privileged by studies of political violence and social memory. My focus is twofold: first, to describe a transition from the world of the social to that of the post-social, i.e. a transition from a welfare state-centered form of the nation to its neoliberal competitive state counterpart; and secondly, to analyze its attendant memory dynamics. I am concerned with the double articulation of collective memory under neoliberalism, the deep and recurring violence it has involved at both the social and individual levels, and its self-articulation as a social memory apparatus.

**Keywords:** social, post-social, neoliberal presentism, memory studies, proletarianization.

If it is true that every national culture is by definition a form of mediation between the specific and the universal, a framework for understanding the connections between the local and the global, then Chilean culture has been working double shifts for a long time. For the past forty-five years it has been defined by a series of international

and global narratives derived, first, from the Cold War struggle and then its post-1989 global neoliberal aftermath. Those narratives understood the history of Chilean social, political and cultural processes as an important performative space. This space showed, first in a rather confusing but then quite vivid fashion, a transition only now fully evident from the world of the social to that of the post-social, i.e. a transition from a welfare state-centered form of the nation to its neoliberal competitive state counterpart (more on this shortly.) To a significant degree, I contend, the cultural history of Chile in this half-century has been an extended meditation on the status of the national as memory, on the forms and uses of a national collective memory of the social in a post-social global context. Any transformative democratization process in Latin America, again my contention, depends on our capacity to understand the interplay between the memory of the social past and the reality of the new and increasingly hegemonic normal present of the post-social. In Lechner and Güell's terms: "The social construction of memory is part of a broader process: the construction of social time" (Lechner and Güell 1999: 187). The latter depends on the way we experience our present in tension with a past and a future. My contention on the memory *of* the national (the history of the properly national moment for a given national society) and the national *as* memory (the extent to which the national itself is a link and an experience formed in and through memory) is precisely an attempt at providing a broader memory framework (perhaps an example of what Halbwachs called *cadre sociaux de memoire*) for an understanding of those relationships and the social and political possibilities they determine. As such, this essay is conceived as an intervention in the field of studies of collective memory after political violence. However, it is not the *after* of violence but its ever *presentness* that interest me here. I am

concerned with the double articulation of collective memory under neoliberalism, the deep and recurring violence it has involved --beyond military force or human rights violations (two crucial but relatively well-studied issues)—and its self-articulation as a social memory apparatus. Neoliberal violence and administration and rearticulation of social memory, I claim, are two sides of the same coin. I posit both the political potential of the live memory of the social within the post-social (as recently shown by the Chilean student movement) and the difficulty of national collective memory under current global conditions. I develop two central ideas: the concept of the post-social and the neoliberal alienation of human memory and the memory of the human (both, knowledges and affects) in a system that coordinates political and libidinal economies (i.e. ways of re/producing and administering social and individual life and wealth) within a social horizon defined by its ‘short-termism’ and thus incapable of thinking intergenerationally.

The Chilean case, it is now clear, made fully visible a form of neoliberal violence and memory processes that have come to define what we understand as the contemporary political and social predicament. What initially was seen as the relatively unsurprising violent imposition of a new political regime in a Latin American country, albeit one that claimed to be exceptional in this regard in the regional context, has turned out to be an exceptionally vivid but otherwise accurate incarnation of the global effectiveness and the revolutionary capacity of neoliberalism and its attendant forms of violence: a restructuring in the organization of the social that reaches well beyond Chile. The neoconservative Chilean revolution ended up being less another *coup d’etat* in a small Latin American country than a sign of what was to come globally in the form of Reaganism and Thatcherism. It entailed a form of radical change in our understanding of

the social, its defining processes, actors and goals: a transformation whose forms of violence turned out to be manifold, and by no means dependent on the imposition of a military dictatorship.

This neoliberal globalization as epochal change has involved as much the imposition of new forms of subjectification and post-social culture as the nostalgic remembrance of a previous historical moment. Four movements are combined in this process and in the cultural experience of the new neoliberal epoch: they look into the present of the nation and out to the world, backward to the past and forward to the uncertain future. I propose that despite its rather insignificant size in the international context, Chile has performed an outsized historic and cultural role in the international comprehension of the dual nature of neoliberal globalization. This dual nature refers to the imposition of both a new political economy (often times referred to as neoliberal trickle-down economics) and a new libidinal economy (based on the stimulation of individual consumption and debt), and above all, to their degree of imbrication and their contrast with previous forms of structuring the social and individual experience. Moreover, I claim that such configuration has been crucial at the level of the constitution of national memory. In other words, that in remembering the forms of the social past or the past forms of the social, we also confirm that, under neoliberal globalization, the national becomes, to a significant degree, such a memory counterpoint. The national in its new openness and disaggregation is now always lived as a permanent contrast between the national social in different stages of dissolution or radical transformation and the national globalized or post-national and its different forms of organization, socialization, subjectification, and memory.

### **The Memory of the Social and the Chilean *Coup d'Etat***

My hypothesis implies a relative and perhaps paradoxical displacement of two of the main objects of what could be considered the intersecting fields of political research and memory studies on the Chilean process of the last forty years. In such view, Chilean culture was seen as insistently remembering the 1973 Pinochet *coup d'etat* and the dictatorial violence that followed it, on the one hand, and then living and analyzing a long transition towards democracy. If my hypothesis is correct, however, what was being remembered or memorialized was, at least from a global perspective, less said political trauma and transition (now turned into symptoms of a broader configuration) and more a violent, global and no less decisive transformation. Before I go on to develop this idea, and in order to understand how it differs from and is linked to memory studies, I will use the work of Elizabeth Jelin, Steve Stern, and Nelly Richard as points of reference.

Steve Stern's trilogy, *The Memory Box of Pinochet's Chile*, uses the idea of a memory box -both the holder of multiple, often contradictory, and partial accounts of the past, and the object of struggles aiming at closing or opening such consideration of the past—to explain the emergence of a memory impasse in Chile. Such an impasse was beyond the simple binary of memory/ forgetting and it included active efforts to forget as well as the obstinate presence of the memory of horror and rupture in both the political left and right. In addition to Stern's useful postulation of a link between individual and social memories through the positing of "emblematic memories," memories capable of shaping the meaning and value of other narratives, and beyond his insightful description of four memory frameworks in Chile ("salvation, rupture, persecution, and awakening" (Stern 2006:145), what I here would like to rescue from his work is his highlighting of

one of the results of the Chilean memory impasse. “The result [declares Stern] was not so much a culture of forgetting, as a culture that oscillated –as if caught in moral schizophrenia—between prudence and convulsion” in its efforts to overcome and deal with the legacy of the Pinochet years. (Stern 2006: XXIX)

Elizabeth Jelin’s *Los Trabajos de la memoria*, the first volume of a series of edited books on *Las Memorias de la represión*, provides an excellent panoramic view of memory studies in connection with political violence. In addition to an emphasis on the active nature of the memory processes associated with political violence –through concepts such as the work of memory, the need to learn to remember, the struggles between dominant, official and suppressed or unofficial memories—and the multiplicity of agents, critical points in time (commemorations), and loci of memory, Jelin distinguishes between operative narrative memories, capable of endowing the past with a functional meaning, and traumatic or wounded memories which cannot find a narrative meaning and manifest as symptoms in a never ending process of mourning. In a similar vein, Patricio Marchant has referred to the 1973 military *coup d’Etat*, which frames the periodization of contemporary Chile (before, during and after), as a “*coup* against representation,” as a radical perturbation of the forms to think and speak of the social. This break of signification, Idelber Avelar, Alberto Moreiras and Nelly Richard have insisted, defines the space of post-dictatorship and posits the challenge of finding another language as an alternative to the responses already offered: the expert and accommodating answers of the social sciences, the communist efforts to refurbish epic past languages or the indifference of consumers in the market.

For Richard that language is provided by the artistic and literary Chilean avant-gardes which respond to the categorical disaster of the *coup* and the loss of meaning of the social with an insistence on not losing sight of the meaning of the loss itself.

Following the work of Moreiras on postdictatorial thought, Richard characterizes the cultural horizon of the Chilean postdictatorship thus:

“la condición postdictatorial se expresa como ‘perdida de objeto’ en una marcada situación de ‘duelo’. Ese dilema melancólico entre ‘asimilar’ (recordar) y ‘expulsar’ (olvidar) atraviesa el horizonte postdictatorial produciendo narraciones divididas entre el enmudecimiento –la falta de habla ligada al estupor de una serie de cambios inasimilables, por su velocidad y magnitud, a la continuidad de la experiencia del sujeto- y la sobreexcitación: gestualidades compulsivas que exageran artificialmente ritmo y señales para combatir la tendencia depresiva con su movilidad postiza.” (Richard 1998: 37)

Faced with this situation, the hegemonic Chilean culture of the postdictatorship has, in its effort to push for consensus, simultaneously exaggerated its novelty and its degree of rupture with the authoritarian past, and hidden the non-new, i.e. the significant degrees of continuity of the legal structures created by the dictatorship and the postdictatorial governments’ policies. The political present is thus defined as a perverse mix of continuity and rupture.

From this quick review of a few important authors working on memory studies and political violence there are a few crucial points that will interest me here. First, both the oscillation between past and present in the definition of political life, and its capacity to limit the imagination of the political horizon of the possible; secondly, the emphasis on narrative and social frameworks as determining the nature of memory; finally, the co-



existence in the historical present of operative and traumatic narratives, sense making and interruption.

More generally, however, within memory studies the Chilean *coup d'état* and its aftermath have traditionally been thought as both exceptions to the rules, and predictable brutal Southern Cone processes exclusively associated with right wing military dictatorships and their human rights violations and excesses. This generated very productive concepts and dynamics --such as the emergence of human rights as a global and national political issue, the cultures of transition to democracy and their manifold searches for the right combination between truth determination and political feasibility— and an acknowledgement of new political and social actors such as social movements, NGOs and women. Those memory studies, however, may have ended up obscuring another potential framework for an understanding of such political developments and human rights violations. I am proposing that the latter were only the most visible part of a much wider and all encompassing global process. Naomi Klein has already referred to the Chilean *coup* as “The First Test” or “Birth Pangs” of what she deems the shock doctrine of disaster capitalism, when under the guise of a crisis that requires exceptional measures and taking advantage of the public’s disorientation and shock (in this case from violence and hyperinflation) a ‘rapid-fire transformation of the economy –tax cuts, free trade, privatized services, cuts to social spending and deregulation-’ is imposed. (Klein 2007: 7) Reading the history of global neoliberalism and referring to the paradigmatic influence of the Chilean case, David Harvey concludes that it “provided helpful evidence to support the subsequent turn to neoliberalism in both Britain (under Thatcher) and the US (under Reagan) in the 1980s. Not for the first time a brutal experiment carried out in

the periphery became a model for the formulation of policies in the centre.” (Harvey 2005: 9)

My hypothesis on the memory of the national and the national as memory adds a temporal dimension to such a consideration of the exemplarity of the Chilean case. This temporal dimension explains the tension between the present, the past, and the future and the cultural and political productivity of such tension.

If states, including the Chilean military dictatorship, use the ‘breakdown’ of the political system and ‘clean slate’ figure as a founding narrative for a national memory capable of creating the foundational basis of their often authoritarian projects, my claim is that the post-social is less a degree of rupture or a break than a form of permanent dialectic between the social past and the post-social present. This in turn defines the future as an uncertain mix of loss, inevitability, and potential.

### **The Argument**

At this point a restatement of my hypothesis and what it does and does not attempt to propose may be in order. By the social, following Jacques Donzelot I understand simply that sphere of governmental intervention on society that emerges in the second half of the nineteenth century –first, in France and later, more broadly-- as a way of dealing with the tensions between right and left wing understandings of Republicanism, stressing individual and collective rights, respectively. The social is a specific sphere of state intervention in the creation of solidarities that do not threaten the ultimate sovereignty of the voting people. Through the carving of social solidarities as a specific sphere of governmental intervention, the State becomes an actor relatively separate from social relations, and more of an arbiter or a “guarantor of social progress”

(Donzelot 1991: 173). By increasingly extending the realms of the social, the state became the Welfare State, a social democratic compromise between liberal democrats and socialism, both a way of increasing opportunity for the actual exercise of individual freedoms and a form of decreasing social risk and market irrationality by promoting social security. The Welfare State administered the social for close to a century but it is now clearly under attack. The steady neoliberal creation of a new political and social 'common sense' has taken full advantage of the tensions between the claims of the welfare state and its impacted capacity to continue delivering the social goods it promised to all its citizens. Instead, the neoliberal new normal has imposed what, from a critical viewpoint, I am calling the post-social.

Thus by post-social I understand a social configuration which results from the transformation of the welfare-state, with the end of its ethos of the social as a solidarity-based commitment administered by the state, and its replacement by a competitive state whose rationality derives from the neoliberal version of the economy, and whose ethos instead of socializing and distributing risk in solidarity, individualizes and privatizes it. Obviously, the post-social does not imply the disappearance of society but it does involve its radical re-structuring.

In the vast field of relations between the economy and culture, we have moved historically from a situation in which the economy was at the service of a certain social transformation defined by non-economic (political, social, and cultural) values to a new scenario in which society is transformed at the pace signaled by economic values. From societies endowed with a certain economy and markets, we have transitioned to market societies. Such transition and transformation have involved a form of memory practice

present in both larger political and everyday life. A certain form of organizing society we called the social becomes, in the post-social, the object of national memory. The social is nostalgically or achingly remembered in an insistent counterpoint with a new post-social way of structuring experience, political horizons, and memory.

My hypothesis then is that if under conditions of neoliberal globalization, the economy has seemingly phagocyted society, if it has transformed its values in the fusion of society and economy in so-called market-societies; such a process can and perhaps must be described as the shift from the social to the post-social. Said transition, the deeper and global transition of which the Chilean one was only an example, is defined by two complementary transformations. First, the new legitimation of zones of inequality with their attendant internalized border zones and the stabilization of zones of exception. Secondly, the privatization of the memory of the social and its replacement by the form of forgetfulness and presentism produced by consumption. The first transformation refers to the organization and ends of the social, while the second is connected to the forms of organization of memory in post-industrial societies.

My thesis on memory *of* the national (the history of the properly national moment for a given national society) and the national *as* memory (the extent to which the national itself is a link and an experience formed in and through memory) is therefore an attempt at seeing memory dynamics in the context of the permanent haunting of the post-social (national as memory) by the half-gone half-present evocation of the social (memory of the national). It is also an effort to insist that the post-social is not an irreversible state but instead a condition open to powerful challenges by the reemergence of forms of social protest and organization, of which the Chilean student movement of the last couple of

years has been an inspiring example. An eruption and disruption stemming from a past capable of interrupting the totalizing nature of the present.

### **The Working of Memory in the Transition from the Social to the Post-social.**

During the first seventy years of the twentieth century the state found in the conjunction of industrial capitalism and welfare state its main form of legitimation. It was the Keynesian compromise that gave workers salaries that allowed their consumption of goods in the economy, because it understood production and consumption as processes integrated within spatial dynamics of coexistence inside the same national market and society. If then the state tended to the universalizing expansion of social rights and social welfare, the same state searches now –in the context of a relative separation between power and politics—for a different form of legitimation. It finds it not in the provision of a modicum of security in the form of welfare for *all* its citizens, but in the need to cut, for budgetary reasons, those services, and often, in the provision of police security and the exploitation of the fear of *some* citizens (the so called *tax paying* ones) against others, excluded or semi-excluded (the *tax eating* ones).

This reterritorialization of the social, the political, and the cultural defines globally the social geography of the post-social. Among its constitutive factors one could mention: a privatization of social risk and its administration in post-social societies (within which pensions, social security, education and many other rights to social services once solidly established are totally or partially privatized, depending now on each individual's contributions and the vagaries of the financial market with the ensuing increase in instability and anxiety); a change from an economy in which many of the good jobs were in manufacturing with high labor intensity, to a new post-industrial

economy of services of less labor intensity; thus a radical flexibilization of the labor force and with it a much higher tolerance for or even legitimization of inequality in the distribution and concentration of wealth.<sup>3</sup>

Instead of socializing and distributing risk in solidarity, the new dominant ethos individualizes and privatizes it, resulting in both dynamics of relative inclusion and exclusion affecting sizable sectors of the population, and the stabilization of zones of exception concerning, most crucially, the young and poor. These zones of exception can then be used to mobilize fear and distrust among the citizenry, and confirm its spatial stratification in a territory crisscrossed by internal borders, dividing the social into subterritories in need of high surveillance. (Poblete 2012; Sánchez 2006)

In this new post-social condition, everyday life and its experience are constituted, to a significant degree, by the memory of a different form of the national and the social and by their permanent contrast with their twilight or occlusion in the present. I am suggesting therefore that in the post-social the sites of memory and the dynamics of evocation and loss are multiplied in such everyday occurrences as the visit to the doctor or the configuration of the workplace, the call to a customer service hotline or a stop at a government office. What we experience in each case is not a clear form of political violence or a blatant violation of our human rights, but, instead, a diffuse discomfort which has slowly become more distinct. We collectively live –although this is surely different for those under and above forty- within the permanent contrast between a sense of how things used to be (and its memory) and the way things are now.

The second process the transition from the social to the post-social presupposes is the privatization of the memory of the social and its unsatisfactory replacement by

forgetfulness in consumption. According to Bernard Stiegler, to the extent that the industrial capitalism of production became the postindustrial capitalism of consumption which has now entered into the crisis of financial capitalism, said capitalism ended up phagocytizing the state and the economy itself. If the state had been throughout the first two thirds of the twentieth century the one agent in charge of adjusting the fit between the apparatus of economic production and the social system, towards the end of the century that same state was sidelined by transnational and speculative capitalism bent on blaming the state for limiting its creative capacities. A predatory capitalism, whose only horizon is the short-term and whose results are the proliferation of so-called externalities (from human to ecological consequences) and the incapacity to think an intergenerational horizon, with the attendant reduction of the economic to immediate speculation and the destruction of credit, i.e. of faith and trust in social investment on the social.

If every true economy presupposes among the participants a commerce of *savoir faire* (knowledge of how to do) and *savoir vivre* (knowledge of how to live), that is to say, an exchange of life and creative materialized ideas, Stiegler's diagnostic on the destructive nature of contemporary capitalism is that it is not properly an economy but an anti-economy, reduced as it is to monetary exchanges. This anti-economy leads to: the destruction of *savoir faire* and *savoir vivre*, a mutation of the nature of work, and a functionalization of production, consumption, and social relations, now inseparable from the technological apparatus. For Stiegler, Plato was the first critic of proletarianization to the extent that he opposed the transfer of live forms of memory and experience to written discourse, a technology that, for him, alienated such memory. The process that leads us to transfer more and more of our human memory to the machines (as manifested in

everyday situations such as the autocorrect of spelling in the machine on which I am writing) is the last result of a vaster process of proletarianization (a term which for Stiegler is not synonymous with economic impoverishment) that has at least three modern moments.

It began in the nineteenth century with the destruction of the *savoir faire* of the workers (of their physical working gestures) by its transfer to the machines, which made possible the creation of a proletarian labor force. It continued in the twentieth century with the destruction of the *savoir vivre* of the workers qua consumers; and has gone on now with the crisis of such forms of production and consumption in a generalized process of cognitive and affective proletarianization. In such process what is alienated to the machines, what is externalized is, in addition to the *savoir faire* and *savoir vivre*, the *savoir theorizer*, i.e. the capacity that allows us to think our own experiences and produce knowledge. (Stiegler 2010: 30) The proletarians of the muscular system, so produced by the machine appropriation of their *savoir faire*, are now joined by the proletarians of the nervous system, who produce cognitive labor without controlling the knowledge thus produced. Grammaticalization is the name Stiegler gives to this process of externalization of memory in its various forms: bodily and muscular, nervous, cerebral, and biogenetic. Once grammaticalized these different forms of memory can be manipulated by systems of biopolitical and sociopolitical control which regulate, in what the author calls a “general organology,” the articulation of bodily organs (muscles, brain, eyes, genitals), artificial organs (tools and machines), and social organs (from the family to the nation as forms of organization of the social and its reproduction). From this viewpoint, proletarianization is, literally, a short-circuit, an interruption and short-



termism; a separation of the worker as producer (but also of the consumer as producer) from the control of the conditions of production and the products thus generated; an interruption of the process of what Stiegler calls transubjective individuation which is the goal of all real knowledge and experience (Stiegler 2010: 43).

I have thus identified a second distinctive dynamics of the experience of the post-social national within my framework for an understanding of the national as memory today and the memory of the national in the past. If the first dynamics is the constant counterpoint between the post-social present and the memory of a previous configuration of the social; the second is the articulation of a political economy with a libidinal economy which regulate as much production as consumption, generating a series of negative externalities (from the destruction of nature to the dearticulation of the social environment, both the basic conditions of forms of individuation and sociality that are truly productive and sustainable) and what Nelly Richard calls “tecnologías de la desmemoria” (Richard 2006: 10) At the national level the result of this double process -- of rearticulation of the social and alienation of memory, dominated by short-circuit and short-termism—is the incapacity of projecting the national (i.e. the memory of its *savoir faire*, *vivre*, and *theorizer*) as a long term collective future. This, I think, is how the memory of the social national is activated and how the post-social national is lived as counterpunctual memory.

### **Articulating Political and Libidinal Economies.**

Like the social –itself described by what Bruce Curtis calls its ‘artefactual’ character: “that it is a product of projects, practices, and techniques which equate and unify empirically disparate objects and relations” (Curtis 2002: 85)—the neoliberal post-

social is the result of active efforts at shaping the lives and souls of its citizens, multiple techniques and practices that help produce it and objectify it. Maurizio Lazzarato, analyzing what he calls “Neoliberalism in action,” refers to some of those techniques that have helped transform society into “an ‘enterprise-society’, based on the market, competition, inequality, and the privileging of the individual.” They include the apparatus of financialization of the economy and society, and strategies such as “individualization, securitization, and depoliticization used as part of neoliberal social policy to undermine the principles of mutualization and redistribution that the Welfare State and Fordism had promoted” (Lazzarato 2009: 109).

I have elsewhere analyzed (Poblete, “A Sense”) two Chilean films of the last decade -- *Taxi para tres* (2001) by Orlando Lübbert and *Super. Todo Chile adentro* (2009) by Fernanda Aljaro and Felipe del Rio—in order to highlight, first, how the invitation to consume and buy by credit in a context of significant social inequality produces subjects in debt, individuals whose “conduct, capacities, needs, aspirations and desires” (Schild 2007: 179) are thus normalized; and secondly, how the humanist critique of such a social configuration becomes internalized by that system’s ability to commodify everything, including dissent.

In this last section of my essay I would like to conclude by analyzing two additional recent Chilean films that help understand the consequences and costs of such neoliberal techniques for the restructuring of the social and the production of the post-social and its memory dynamics: *Tony Manero*, a film by Pablo Larraín (2008) and *Nostalgia de la Luz*, a documentary by Patricio Guzmán (2010). The first will help us understand the psychic mechanisms behind the original neoliberal violence and its

present aftereffects, while the second will be read as a reflection on the artifactualness of the production of memory in the contrasting contexts of the social and the post-social in Chile.

*Tony Manero* is one of the most radical Latin American film explorations of the deep social violence involved in the continental implantation of neoliberalism. While seemingly inscribed as yet another third world reflection on the world of fandom, media consumption and creative spectatorship in the midst of mass mediated communication and social relations, along the lines of *Strictly Ballroom* or *Slumdog Millionaire*, *Tony Manero* ends up offering a trenchant critique of neoliberalism as represented by the arrival in Chile of both a new model of society and a form of mass mediated modernity which found in global Hollywood one of its main vehicles of reproduction.

Situated in 1979 at the end of one of the most violent periods of repression of the Pinochet dictatorship and at the beginning of its process of institutionalization and attempted legitimization --through both the drafting of a new constitution and the imposition of a new model of (market) society, i.e. a society for which competition and consumption will become the fundamental pillars and paradigms of all social relationships-- *Tony Manero* is an extraordinary and disconcerting film experience. On the one hand, we as spectators cannot but identify, at least partially, with the main character and his underdog effort to perform as well as Tony Manero in *Saturday Night Fever* and win a TV contest of John Travolta look-and-dance-alikes. On the other, the repulsion before the multiple murders and crimes this Chilean Manero feels obliged to commit in order to bankroll his artistic and creative endeavors, forces us to see the much less glittering underside of the spectacle, its political and psychic unconscious. This is

accomplished through an uncomfortable and disconcerting juxtaposition of the shiny world of fandom and creative emulation with the much grimmer, darker and grainy world of poverty, brutal physical and social violence. The film, however, ends up not simply representing an external violent social and political reality, but actually redefining its mode of filmic incorporation. Eventually, the violence for the spectator resides less in the crimes coldly perpetrated by this sociopath than in the psychic contrast or alternation between radically different genres the actual film viewer is forced to activate and experience simultaneously. The result of this enactment of symbolic struggle and violence in the mind of the spectator is as close to an effective representation of the long-term and long-lasting historical violence produced by the dictatorship on Chilean society as any of the many films that have more realistically attempted to depict it. The reason is simple: rather than exploring a world out there, a historical experience preexisting its film representation, *Tony Manero* has sought to represent it through one of the psychic mechanisms that allowed for the simultaneous imposition of a market society predicated on the radical freedom of the uncoerced consuming individual, and a brutal form of collective outward and inward violence; a reproduction of a call to live in the permanently glittering world of consumption in the here and now at the expense of any sense of historical memory or justice. Moreover, the film has sought to do so using a form of filmic cognitive dissonance that reinscribes the Hollywood encyclopedia of topics, genres and styles into its real political economy in an attempt to represent in film the subordinated memories of Latin American experiences (Poblete, “Subordinated”).

*Nostalgia de la Luz* is the latest of a long and illustrious series of documentaries by Patricio Guzmán that explore the national memory process around the Chilean road to

democratic socialism, its tragic end in September of 1973, the violent dictatorial aftermath, and the long and protracted postdictatorship period. This series has included the trilogy of *La Batalla de Chile*, *Salvador Allende*, *Chile la Memoria Obstinada*, and *El Caso Pinochet*. In this context -that of a seasoned and inspired director and scriptwriter who has devoted his film career to thinking the knots connecting nation, politics, and memory—Guzmán's latest film becomes a particularly honest and beautiful reflection on both documentary film as a practice, capable of rendering historical experience visible, and the technologies of memory and forgetting under neoliberal conditions that tend to invisibilize such experience or render it partial and inoperative.

The film is structured around the contrast between three forms of the here (spaces) and now (times) of the nation. There is, first, an almost mythical present in the past, when Guzmán was young and in Chile “la vida era provinciana. Nunca ocurría nada y los presidentes de la República caminaban por la calle sin protección. El tiempo presente era el único tiempo que existía.”<sup>4</sup> Then there is, by contrast, the almost unbearable present of the current neoliberal moment, a present defined by its incapacity to produce a coherent narrative of the historical memory of the nation and haunted by the never ending search of those who seek to recover the bones of their disappeared relatives. As the documentary comes to a close, Guzmán concludes with a third form of the present: “Yo creo que la memoria tiene fuerza de gravedad. Siempre nos atrae. Los que tienen memoria son capaces de vivir en el frágil tiempo presente. Los que no la tienen no viven en ninguna parte.”<sup>5</sup> This third fragile form of the present is paradoxically defined by its unique capacity to enable social action by effectively remembering the history of the nation, thus providing its subjects with a solid grounding for future action. In this

third case of the present, time as memory becomes the condition of any acceptable location or national spatiality.

The two dimensions, temporal and spatial, historical and geopolitical, are fully intertwined. If Chile was back then “un remanso de paz, aislado del mundo,”<sup>6</sup> then history happened twice via a revolutionary and a counter-revolutionary process. Both meant a displacement of the relevant spatialities and temporalities of the nation: “Esta vida tranquila se acabó un día. Un viento revolucionario nos lanzó al centro del mundo. (...) Más tarde un golpe de estado barrió con la democracia, los sueños y la ciencia.”<sup>7</sup> If, as Guzmán says right before the closing credits, “Cada noche, lentamente, impasible, el centro de la galaxia pasa por encima de Santiago,”<sup>8</sup> the challenge of *Nostalgia de la Luz* is how to comprehend the scales and coordinates of the nation, the scales of its times and places that allow a proper understanding of its global and cosmic history and location.

In order to do that, Guzmán turns his attention inward and outward. Inward, by searching both in his own past and his unending desire to reconstruct the memory of the nation, and in the affective life of those who search in the desert for their disappeared relatives or live with the legacy of such disappearances. Outward, by focusing on the documentary genre itself (and its forms of capturing the real and its times) and the many artifacts, instruments, knowledges, and strategies that allow human beings to both apprehend the connections between the past, the present, and the future; and find their place in the world.

In this exploration of both documentary technologies for rendering the social visible and the transcendental categories of time and space that make possible the conceptualization of the experience of the nation, the Atacama desert becomes a cypher

figure of such nation. The desert, a gigantic patch of brown visible from outer space, is the location of multiple forms of life, from prehistoric times to contemporary human rights violations and scientific archeological and astronomical explorations, including nineteenth and early twentieth century commercial exploitation of *salitre* (saltpeter). It is also the scenario for forms of affective and political searches into and for the memory of the nation as such.

Turned into a text and a scenario (“El aire transparente, delgado nos permite leer en este gran libro abierto de la memoria, hoja por hoja.”) the desert functions as a memory box, holding inside as much the record of the distant, medium and recent past as the possibility and grounding of a future for the nation. The key connector is that fragile present, itself revealed now as always already penetrated by the past, a time/space construct produced as much by the instruments and knowledges that let us apprehend it as by the structure of our perceptual apparatus. In both cases, the light mediates and allows the perception and understanding of the present time/space of Chile as always already a reflection and manifestation of the past, a present that exists only as memory.

The documentarist’s work --itself one more of a long line of knowledges and practices that produce the social national, including Archeology (distant pre-national past), History (Republican and post-social past), and Astronomy (the cosmic and global location of the nation)—must reveal the natural and social constructedness of all national times (past, present, and future) and their reliance on a “manipulation” of data that is always coming from the past. From this viewpoint, all knowledges on the nation are memory practices. Like astronomers --who know that for their current perception of the universe through telescopes “el pasado es la gran herramienta”<sup>10</sup> (to the extent that they

analyze light phenomena that have taken a long time to arrive to us)- the documentary film-maker must be able to learn from the professional knowledges of the archeologist, the historian, and the astronomer on and for the manipulation and interpretation of the past. He must also combine the affective knowledges of those who suffered imprisonment in the desert but learned to survive by looking up at the sky or by preserving in memory the spatial dimensions of their concentration camp, and the affective and memory practices of the relatives who search for their lost ones, like astronomers of the land or archeologists of the present and the future. The documentary film maker must be able to connect those practices of memory and interpretation of the past if she is to reveal the secret of the nation: that the present and thus the future are always already haunted and constituted by the past, that they are always already memory processes.

Those instruments and knowledges reveal that, as much as the desert, the nation is a layered time/space for which memory processes are fundamental and constitutive. The documentary, with its memory of different forms of the sensible, its political insistence on making visible, and its focus on the artifactualness, or mediated perception/ construction of the real in the here and now of the nation, allows us to see the haunting presence and potential ferment of the social (as human memory) in the midst of the neoliberal post-social desert. Only thus will we have a chance to understand the Chilean mediation between the specific and the universal in the last half-century.

## **Conclusion**

In a well-known essay on what he calls “irruptions of memory” and “expressive politics” in the Chilean transition to democracy, Alexander Wilde defines the former as:



“...public events that break in upon Chile’s national consciousness, unbidden and often suddenly, to evoke associations with symbols, figures, causes, ways of life, (...) associated with a political past that is still present in the lived experience of a major part of the population.” (Wilde 1999: 475)

These irruptions –including political violence and the discovery of mass graves but also shows of force by the military and the Pinochet trial in London- were part of and challenges to the expressive politics of postdictatorship democratic governments. In rekindling the political struggles and forms of violence of the past and their memories, they reminded people of the limitations of actually existing democracy in Chile. They extended the duration of the *Transición* by questioning the depth of the democratic regime and its moral authority given the existence of “unreconciled memories of a divided past” (Wilde 1999: 496) The student movements I mentioned before are another form of irruption of the past in the present. This time not of the dictatorial past but of the pre-dictatorial epoch of the social. A time when accessible public education, proper political representation, and equality for all, were seen not only as worth fighting for but feasible political goals. Disrupting the hegemony of the possible under the post-dictatorial transition, all three goals have now been centrally embraced by the current, and significantly more radical, Michelle Bachelet second presidential campaign.

What my hypothesis on the post-social has attempted to explain is another long term transition of which the Chilean *Transición* has turned out to be only a part; a form of ‘lived experience’ based as much on memories of the national *qua* social as on their contrast with the national as impacted memory under neoliberal post-social regimes with their attending memory administration machines. As such, my approach has attempted to

highlight not the forms of *past* violence (military force and human rights violations) we have come to identify with memory and political violence studies. Instead, I have focused on the ever *present* nature of neoliberal violence and its self-articulation as an apparatus for the production and administration of social and individual memory. Those memories of the multiple pasts and their daily counterpoint with the fabric of the present are both the source of Chile's comfort and discomfort with its own form of modernity and the spring from which true challenges to the status quo may emerge.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> "The truth of memory does not reside as much in the precision of the facts (*res factae*) as in the narrative and their interpretation (*res fictae*)"

<sup>2</sup> "...the postdictatorial condition is expressed as a 'loss of object' in a definite situation of 'mourning' (...) The melancholic dilemma between 'assimilating' (remembering) and 'expelling' (forgetting) traverses the postdictatorial horizon, producing narratives divided between a muteness –the lack of speech linked to the stupor of a series of changes that, given their velocity and magnitude, cannot be assimilated to the continuity of a subject's experience- and overstimulation: compulsive gestures that artificially exaggerate the rhythm and signs to combat depressive tendencies with their artificial mobility." (Richard 2004: 22)

<sup>3</sup> In an interesting and recently published study, Juan Carlos Castillo points out how, contrary to a normative perspective that would presuppose that higher degrees of inequality would generate a stronger social demand for equality, the data from public opinion surveys indicate that, in Chile, they have produced more legitimization of

inequality. Chilean society as whole accepts and justifies today higher degrees of inequality than it did in the past. Castillo (2012)

<sup>4</sup> “Life was provincial. Nothing ever happened and the presidents of the Republic walked the streets without bodyguards. The present time was the only one that existed.”

<sup>5</sup> “I believe that memory has a force of gravity. It always attracts us. Those who have a memory are capable of living in the fragile present time. Those who don’t have one cannot live anywhere.”

<sup>6</sup> “An oasis of peace, insulated from the world.”

<sup>7</sup> “Every night, slowly, impassible, the center of the galaxy flies over Santiago.”

<sup>8</sup> “This quiet life came to an end one day. A revolutionary wind threw us in the middle of the world (...) Later, a *coup d’etat* swept democracy, dreams, and science away.”

<sup>9</sup> “The transparent and thin air allows us to read in this grand open book of memory, page after page.”

<sup>10</sup> “The past is the great tool.”

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